

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 16, 2001

Contact: John-Mark Hack, Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy
(502) 564-4627
Doug Thomas, Kentucky Department of Agriculture
(502) 564-4696

**State Agricultural Development Board Approves \$605,000 for
West Kentucky Growers Cooperative**

The Kentucky Agricultural Development Board voted today to approve a \$605,000 grant request submitted by the Owensboro-based West Kentucky Growers Cooperative. The award will go to purchase equipment needed by the produce marketing cooperative to expand its sweet corn production and marketing efforts, including a hydro cooler that will ensure that the cooperative's products are suitable for their customers.

Governor Patton praised the Board's action to boost the efforts of producers in Daviess and surrounding counties to explore alternative crops to replace lost tobacco income.

"This action means that the West Kentucky Growers Cooperative will be able to better meet the needs of their customers in marketing their sweet corn this year and in the future. While this money will be spent on equipment, it is an investment in an aggressive group of producers looking for income alternatives, in their agricultural diversification efforts, and in the future of agriculture in western Kentucky," said Governor Paul Patton.

The award was made as one of eleven projects approved by the Board during its meeting today. The Board approved a total of \$4,443,000 in state level projects, including the West Kentucky Growers Cooperative, and \$403,600 in a variety of county-level programs.

"The West Kentucky Growers Cooperative is a prime example of farmers coming together to find other ways to make a living in the wake of significant losses of tobacco income," Agriculture Commissioner Billy Ray Smith said. "It is off to an excellent start, and the Board is pleased to provide them the resources to continue to grow."

"This investment will expand the direction of Kentucky agriculture into value-added commodities," said West Kentucky Growers Cooperative President Rick Kamuf. "We will be able to promote vegetable production as a viable way to help supplement losses from tobacco income."

Staff of the Agricultural Development Board will meet soon with the West Kentucky Cooperative's Board of Directors to work out the details for the approved expansion. The commitment by the Board comes at just the time the Cooperative needs to purchase the new hydro cooler for sweet corn processing this season.